

## Recovering From A Crisis Situation

Written by M.A. Legaz, MSW, EAP Counselor. © Working Solutions, Inc.

If you or someone you know has experienced a frightening situation, overwhelming danger or a sudden loss of security, you may experience what is commonly called “post traumatic stress.” In other words, after a very scary or difficult situation, you may experience significant stress or discomfort.

It is important to remember even a “perceived” or “imagined” threat of violence or danger can be as emotionally disturbing as a real threat of violence. When a person experiences an event as life-threatening, it shatters one’s basic assumptions about self and the world we live in.

Immediately after the traumatic experience, a person may not feel anything except numbness and shock. As time goes on, more feelings emerge and many people find themselves “re-playing” the event over and over in their heads, creating different scenarios about what they could have done differently. Some people just can’t forget the uncontrollable feelings of terror, helplessness and the loss of control they felt at the time. It is not unusual to feel hyper-alert or jumpy, to have difficulty going to sleep, or emotionally withdrawn from friends and loved ones. Anxiety, anger and depression are common early responses. Over time, one may find themselves experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms of stress:

### Physical

- Sweating
- Appetite changes
- Rashes
- Tension
- Fatigue
- Increase of alcohol use
- Headaches
- Insomnia

### Intellectual

- Forgetfulness
- Dulled Senses
- Poor Concentration
- Poor job performance
- Negative self-talk
- Confusion
- Difficulty making decisions

### Emotional -

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Mood swings
- Anger
- Depression
- Stoicism
- Grief
- Frustration
- Crying spells
- Easily discouraged
- Apathy
- Easily startled

### Behavioral -

- Withdrawal
- Lashing out at others
- Irritable with others
- Loss of interest in activities
- Difficulty in getting to work on time
- Lowered sex drive
- Inability to perform previous tasks
- Nagging

Responses to a frightening event are individual and the preceding symptoms are normal reactions that can vary in severity and duration. Following are ideas and suggestions to help deal with whatever reactions and feelings are experienced.

**Talk to someone who will listen and allow you to experience your feelings -**

The most important supportive people may be your work group. Very possibly you have gone through the trauma together and they know how you're feeling. Talking to co-workers about your individual feelings and supporting one another in a non-judgmental way is part of the healing and recovery process. Not talking about your feelings will not make them go away. As you express your feelings, understand that these feelings are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Share with co-workers and family what you saw, heard, touched, smelled, etc. It's okay to recreate the experience as it happened. It will help you not to imagine or fantasize the situation and to deal with what affected you the most.

**Talk to your family and friends -**

They need to know what's happening to you. Don't shut them out or underestimate their ability to understand and deal with life's traumas. Involve them in ways they can support you: meeting for lunch, taking you to or picking you up from work, going for a walk together. This provides both exercise and a time to share.

**Use your community -**

Call your EAP, minister, physician, counselor, the local crisis line, etc.

**Use extra precautions with your safety -**

Precautions allow you to regain a feeling of control over your life.

**Take care of yourself -**

Be sure to find time to exercise and eat well. Avoid drugs and alcohol. Ask for assistance from family and friends, delegate simple daily tasks that may feel overpowering right now.

**Continue talking to people over time and share what has been happening to you since the event -**

Are you experiencing tension, poor concentration, the need for longer lunch breaks, sleeplessness, irritability, tardiness, nightmares, crying spells, etc.? As you share your feelings with others, the reactions will begin to fade over a period of time. It is important to allow yourself time to grieve and for your feelings of security to heal at their own pace. Keep in mind that who you are, your personal values, the amount of social support you have and other life events you have experienced are all factors that will affect the resolution of a traumatic event. It is important to integrate this event into your life and not try to "forget" it ever happened.

Sometimes it takes weeks or months to become aware of how the event affected you. Denying that a frightening event has affected you can be a major problem in integrating the experience into your life. No one will be entirely symptom free.

Other events in your life may trigger vivid memories of this trauma and new sudden feelings. If you find that your reactions are seriously disrupting your ability to work or maintain relationships with others, please consider seeking professional counseling.

The GIC offers Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Benefits as a resource to all agencies at no cost to the individual. These services are provided by United Behavioral Health. All state employees can access critical incident debriefing services on site at your agency. Additionally, managers and supervisors can receive confidential consultations and resource recommendations for dealing with employee issues such as low morale, stress management, disruptive workplace behavior, mental illness, and substance abuse; managers and supervisors can obtain EAP Services for their agency by calling 781-768-2277. Individuals seeking one-on-one counseling should call their HMO; indemnity and PPO plan members call United Behavioral Health 1-888-610-9039.